

Waterfowl Advisory Committee
February 7, 2023
Meeting Minutes
Samworth Wildlife Management Area
420 Dirleton Road, Georgetown, SC 29440

Members Present:

Chairman Bob Perry, John Hilton, Jerry Lee, Bill Mace, Stuart Cochran.

DNR Staff Present:

SCDNR Director Robert Boyles, WFF Deputy Director Emily Cope, WFF Chief of Wildlife Billy Dukes, Assistant Chief of Wildlife (Regions 2 & 4) Sam Chapplelear, Assistant Chief of Wildlife (Regions 1 & 3) Willie Simmons, Statewide Waterfowl Biologist Molly Kneece, Upper Coastal Waterfowl Project Leader Achi Treptow, Regional Coordinator (Region 4) Alicia Farrell, Assistant Regional Coordinator (Region 4) Zadok Moss, Technician Zoey Fletcher, First Sergeant Ryan Williams, Administrative Assistant Lane Peters, WFF Senior Administrative Assistant Kelsey Huffstetler

Constituents Present:

Casey Moorner, Ernie Guerry, Allan Stack, Judson Riser, Carl Bussells, Jim Hills, Mark Prudhomme, Paul Edwards, Thomas Ragsdale, K. Alex Cook, Castles Leland, Matt Coon, Mike Hardee, David Floyd, Edward Hixon II, Stephan Chestnut, Brad Courtney Jr., Bryson Gilbert, Seth Hayden, Randall Ward, Marshall Truluck, Charles Ragsdale

Call to Order

Chairman Perry called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM with notice that the date, time, and place of this meeting was posted on the DNR website and mailed to the news media in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act.

Chairman Perry called on Director Robert Boyles who made opening remarks thanking DNR staff, the Committee members, and constituents, for their involvement and interest in the Waterfowl Advisory Committee.

Introductions and Constituent Comments

Staff and constituents introduced themselves and provided their background and interests.

Chairman Perry recognized and commended First Sgt. Ryan Williams for his many years of dedicated service with reference to his tireless work patrolling and safeguarding the wintering waterfowl resource and protecting the Upper Coastal Waterfowl Project from poaching and other violations.

Constituents who wished to speak included:

- **Casey Moorner** (Santee Cooper Lake Management) outlined the goals and objectives of the Santee Cooper Lake Management Team as they pertain to managing wildlife habitat and spoke briefly about her role on the Aquatic Plant Management Council (APMC), and their data collection efforts and individual objectives. Chairman Perry thanked Casey and her team for attending and offered for them to return.
- **Mike Hardee** (Horry-Georgetown Sportsmen's Coalition) provided commentary and expressed personal concerns with the progress of repair efforts, management practices, and expenditures at Samworth WMA.

Approval of Minutes

John Hilton moved to approve the minutes of the December 6, 2022, Waterfowl Advisory Committee meeting with recommended changes. The motion was seconded by Bill Mace and passed with unanimous approval by the Committee.

Election of Vice-Chairman

The Committee elected John Hilton as the Vice-Chairman upon motion made by Bill Mace, seconded by Stuart Cochran, and passed with unanimous approval by the Committee.

Comments from the Chair and DNR Leadership

Chairman Perry and Chief Dukes responded to questions from constituents regarding budgets and timelines for repairs at Samworth Wildlife Management Area. Deputy Director Cope and Chief Dukes offered brief commentary on waterfowl management plans, as well as praise to the DNR staff members involved in the waterfowl program and plans to broaden public outreach regarding the waterfowl program.

Review and Discussion of the 2022 Waterfowl Advisory Committee Annual Report

Chairman Perry gave a brief overview of H.4177, and the Committee's role as it pertains to the bill. As required by H.4177, the Committee submitted the first annual Waterfowl Advisory Committee Report to the General Assembly on December 31, 2022, with appended reports compiled by DNR staff. Chairman Perry requested that the report be made available to the public through a link on DNR's website on the Committee's page.

Discussion and Recommendations on Clemson and Beaverdam WMAs

The Committee and DNR Staff discussed improvement recommendations for Clemson Waterfowl Area and Beaverdam Creek WMA. Following property evaluations, plans are in place to re-core and re-top dikes and install hog-panel fencing at Clemson Waterfowl Area. Biologist Kneece met with upstate DNR staff and will be meeting with engineers to gather data on frequent flash flood events to form a water-control management plan. The Committee recommended staff developing more vertical structure and cover within the Clemson impoundment.

Waterfowl Season Dates Discussion

Chief Dukes provided an explanation on how waterfowl season dates are set, and what is allowable within federally regulated guidelines. Historically, the Migratory Gamebird Committee first meets to discuss federal frameworks before submitting staff recommendations to the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee, followed by the SCDNR Board, for final approval before the submission deadline of April 30, each year. Chief Dukes indicated the season is set more by tradition than data. The Committee asked DNR staff to consider research to evaluate if the traditional waterfowl season dates correlate strongly with migratory chronology and distribution of the waterfowl in the state. Chairman Perry indicated there should be a goal to maximize waterfowl population, hunter days afield, harvest opportunity, weekend and holiday hunt days, and lottery hunt opportunity.

Update and Discussion on Samworth WMA

Statewide Waterfowl Biologist Kneece presented an update on the status of waterfowl habitat and infrastructure at Samworth WMA as well as activities and repairs conducted since Hurricane Ian (September 30, 2022) which resulted in significant flood damage to portions of the property, including infrastructure damage, dike breaches and erosion across many of the units. Repairs were initiated by DNR staff immediately following the storm and are ongoing at this time. Biologist Kneece, and Chief Dukes fielded questions regarding expenditures, procurement timelines, and various other challenges that DNR staff face when repairing damaged sites. Total expenditures on Samworth WMA, going back to 2015, are at \$6.5 million dollars, which includes but is not limited to equipment procurement, and contracted construction projects.

Discussion on the 2023 South Carolina Aquatic Plant Management Plan

Casey Moorner (Santee Cooper) discussed data collected to justify grass-carp stocking numbers to control hydrilla in the Santee Cooper lakes. The APMC has been working to stabilize the grass carp population, control invasive vegetation, and re-establish native vegetation. Per Ms. Moorner, there are currently an estimated 34,000 stocked grass-carp in the system, and hydrilla coverage is up by thirty-six percent. The goal of the APMC is to employ maintenance stocking of sterile of sterile grass carp to keep a minimum population and put pressure on hydrilla

while allowing native vegetation to flourish. The Committee noted the 2023 Draft Aquatic Plant Management Plan did not quantify hydrilla acreage in the Lakes. The Committee conveyed concern with the APMC's goal to control hydrilla, relating to the impact it would have on recreational fishing and waterfowl hunting opportunity, and requested additional data on the extent of hydrilla coverage in the Lakes. The Committee urged restraint with respect to increasing the 2023 maintenance stocking of sterile grass carp into the system.

Request from Staff Regarding Bear Island West WMA

Chairman Perry gave a brief update about a special request made by Deputy Director Cope, Chief Dukes, and Biologist Daniel Barrineau, to tour Bear Island West, and offer additional input about the property, its challenges, and current management practices. Chairman Perry has assembled an Ad Hoc Committee of experts in Managed Tidal Impoundments with emphasis on brackish habitats. The Ad Hoc Committee has scheduled a site-visit on February 14, 2023, and has requested further data and historical information to assist with the review process. A report and recommendations will be submitted to DNR staff by the Ad Hoc Committee and will be made available at the next Committee meeting.

Discussion on Anchoring Documents

Chairman Perry detailed the Committee's desire to establish a Waterfowl Advisory Committee Charter, urged DNR staff to craft a statewide waterfowl management plan, and craft mission and vision statements and guiding principles for the statewide waterfowl project and Committee. Chairman Perry indicated an overarching goal to increase waterfowl hunting opportunity and numbers of wintering waterfowl in the State. Citing a need to measure what is to be managed, it is not unreasonable to put emphasis on data collection, data analysis, reporting, publishing as well as increased public outreach efforts.

Other Business

Chairman Perry invited Mark Prudhomme, Ramsey Grove Plantation Manager, to speak about the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism's recent acquisition of the property. Tentatively, DNR has reached an agreement with the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism to manage the waterfowl habitat at Ramsay Grove.

Date, Time, and Location of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Waterfowl Advisory Committee will be held at 9:00 AM, on Wednesday, May 3, 2023, at Santee Coastal Reserve Wildlife Management Area, located at 220 Santee Gun Club Road, McClellanville, SC. The Committee requested an emphasis on the repair efforts at Santee-Delta WMA with a tour of that site upon the conclusion of the meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 PM.